

Beaver/Swift/Skyles Timber Sale Project Initial Proposal

June 12, 2007

Volume 1
Issue 1

Timber Sale Project is in the Initial Stage of Development

Montana's Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC/ Department), Stillwater and Kalispell units, are proposing the Beaver/ Swift/Skyles Timber Sale Project. The project is in the initial stages of development and public involvement for an Environmental Impact Statement.

This newsletter is to inform you of the project and its opportunities and includes the following information:

- The project's objectives, opportunities, considerations, and timeline.
- DNRC's philosophies, directives, and mandate for management of State trust lands.
- General information about the project area.

If you are familiar with the *WHITEFISH NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN*, the project area is within the Beaver Lake/Skyles and Swift Creek subareas.

- Maps that show the proposed harvest units can be seen on pages 4 and 5.

Why were these areas chosen for harvesting at this time?

These 3 areas are at high risk for high-intensity stand-replacement fires and were chosen at this time to reduce fuel hazards in the urban interface. The high risk factor is due to the overall stand density and

*Harvesting timber
provides revenue for
State trusts while
maintaining a healthy,
productive forest .*

excessive amount of ladder and ground fuels caused by standing and fallen dead trees. Fir engraver beetles (*Scolytus ventralis*) attacked grand fir, which resulted in mortality rates as high as 25 percent in some stands. Also, dwarf mistletoe *Arceuthobium laricis*) has infected western larch, which has also contributed toward timber stand mortality.

Timber would be harvested from 500 to 1,000 acres of State trust lands in portions of Sections 7, 16, 19, 20, 21, and 29 in Township 32 north, Range 22 west, and Sections 29, 32, and 33 in Township 31 north, Range 22 west.

This project is part of an ongoing effort to produce revenue for the State trusts while maintaining a healthy and productive forest into the future.

Tours and Comment Period

The Department would like the general public to express their interests and concerns related to timber management on these parcels of land. The comment period will remain open until July 12, 2007.

Foresters from Stillwater Unit will conduct separate field tours of the Beaver

Lake and lower Swift Creek areas during this comment period. See *Page 7, GUIDED FIELD TOURS*, for more information. Tours have not been scheduled for the Kalispell Unit project; if interest in a tour is shown, accommodations will be made.

*See Page 7 for
more information
about the guided
tours*

Inside this issue:

Management and Planning of State Trust Lands	2
State Forest Land Management Plan (SFLMP)	2
Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA)	2
Project Objectives and Opportunities	3
Project Considerations	3
Beaver/Skyles Proposal Area Map	4
Lower Swift Proposal Area Map	5
Roads	6
Did You Know...	6
The Unit's Involvement in the Whitefish Neighborhood Plan Subareas	6
Guided Field Tours	7
What is the Next Step in the Process?	7
If You Wish to Stay Involved in this Project	8

Special points of interest:

- Timber would be harvested on 500 to 1,000 acres on portions of 8 sections.
- Guided tours are scheduled..
- The public comment period will be open until July 12, 2007.
- For continued involvement in the environmental analysis process of this timber sale, fill out and submit the form on the back page.

Management and Planning of State Trust Lands

DNRC's Directive

Federal lands were granted to the State when Montana was admitted into the Union. The Enabling Act of 1889 granted Sections 16 and 36 of each township to the State of Montana; or, as in the case of Stillwater State Forest, a block of land in lieu of sections in other areas.

Montana's Constitution requires that these lands, called State trust lands, be managed to provide revenue



Revenue from timber sales on State trust lands help support schools such as the West Valley Grade School

to support specific beneficiary institutions, such as public schools, State colleges and universities, and other specific State institutions. The Land Board and the Department are legally required to administer these trust lands to produce the largest measure of reasonable and legitimate long-term return for these beneficiary institutions (Section 77-1-202, Montana Codes Annotated (MCA)).

State Forest Land Management Plan (SFLMP)

On May 30, 1996, the Department released the Record of Decision on the SFLMP. The Land Board approved its implementation on June 17, 1996. The Department adopted the Forest Management Rules (*Administrative Rules of Montana [ARM] 36.11.401 through 450*). The SFLMP outlines the management philosophy, and the proposed project will be implemented according to the Forest Management Rules. The philosophy is:

"Our premise is that the best way to produce long-term income for the trust is to manage intensively for healthy and biologically diverse forests. Our understanding is that a diverse forest is a stable forest that will produce the most reliable and highest long-term revenue stream... In the foreseeable future, timber management will continue to be our primary

source of revenue and our primary tool for achieving biodiversity objectives."

"...Our understanding is that a diverse forest is a stable forest that will produce the most reliable and highest long-term revenue stream..." SFLMP

Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA)

The State and Federal laws that apply to trust lands are, essentially, the same as those that apply to private lands, which include laws pertaining to water and air quality, the Endangered Species Act, etc. The activities related to forest management on State trust lands are also subject to planning and the environmental assessment

requirements of MEPA, which include:.

- approaching a project using team members with various resource specialties;
- studying any proposal that involves unresolved conflict and potentially develop or consider alternatives;

- using environmental data in the planning of the project; and
- providing opportunities for citizens to participate in the discussion of the proposed projects prior to decisions being made.

Project Objectives and Opportunities

In order to meet the goals of DNRC's management philosophy, the Department has set specific project objectives:

- Promote biodiversity by managing for appropriate stand structures and species compositions based on ecological characteristics such as topography, habitat type, disturbance regime, and unique characteristics.
- Reduce the hazard of fuel loading in the urban interface through forest management activities that will regenerate new stands of healthy trees and the vigor and growth of trees remaining in the forest. Reducing fuel loading should result in lower intensity fires,

which are usually safer to fight, cheaper to suppress, and involve less acres.

- Contribute to the Department's/ Northwestern Land Office's target of annual timber-harvest volume. DNRC is required by State law (77-5-221 through 223, *Montana Codes Annotated*) to harvest approximately 53.2 million board feet of timber annually (2 to 5 MMbf of timber [445 to 1,110 log truck loads] would be harvested with this project). This calculation is completed every 10 years to determine the amount of timber that can be harvested annually on a sustainable basis from State trust lands, given all applicable laws and

environmental commitments described in the *SFLMP* and *Administrative Rules (ARMS 36.11.401 through 450, 20003)*. Important ecological commitments related to biodiversity, forest health, threatened and endangered species, riparian buffers, old growth, and desired species mix and coverts were incorporated into the sustained yield calculation.

DNRC would also consider other opportunities that would produce long-term revenue to the State trusts. However, the complete proposals must show the ability to produce long-term revenue comparable to timber management.

Project Considerations

Who will analyze the project?

An Interdisciplinary (ID) Team, consisting of wildlife and fisheries biologists, a hydrologist, fire management personnel, and Stillwater Unit/Kalispell Unit foresters will analyze this project.

What will be analyzed within the project area?

Within and surrounding the project area, the ID Team will evaluate impacts to:

- vegetation,
- fire hazard,
- old-growth stands,
- timber stand health,
- roads/transportation system,
- hydrology/water quality,
- fisheries,
- soils,
- economics,
- aesthetics (visual),
- cultural resources, and
- wildlife.

Due to the high risk of stand-replacement wildfires, these three areas were chosen to reduce fuel hazards.



Results of a stand-replacement fire on State trust lands.

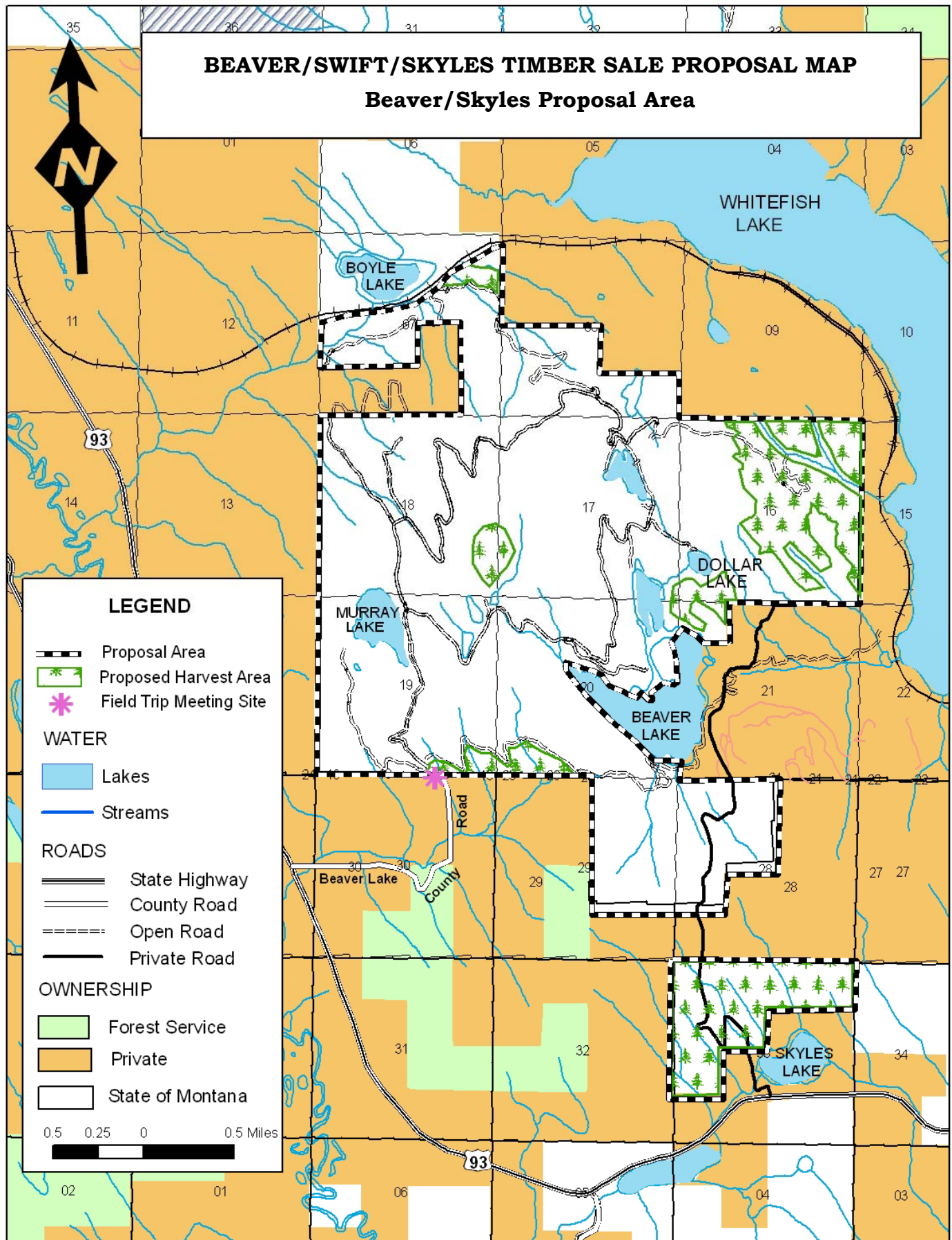
How is the Department trying to change these timber stands?

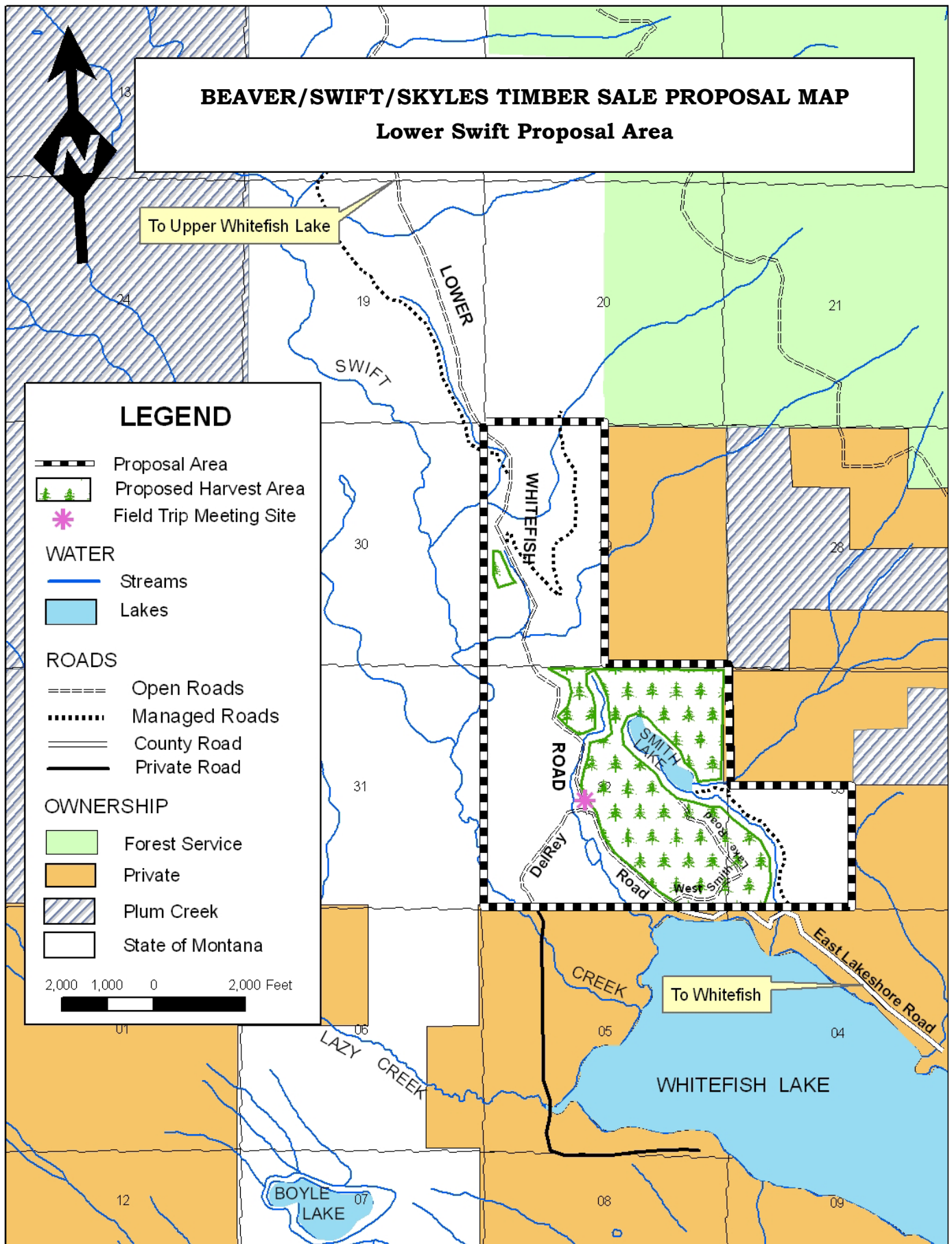
The fire regime of the Beaver/Skyles area are of mixed severity with a moderate fire frequency. Due to fuel loading, stand density, and tree mortality, this area is at high risk of an intensive stand-replacement fire. The Department would like to

reduce the fire risk to a more natural, manageable level.

A method to move towards a more moderate fire intensity is through modifying certain natural characteristics such as species composition, stand structure, and density. This may be achieved by using a variety of silvicultural treatments in patches across the forest landscape in a mosaic pattern. By doing this a variety of age classes of trees are created that are less prone to becoming infected with diseases and infested by insects. This mosaic pattern will also reduce the risk of losing whole stands by wildfires while also providing for a variety of wildlife needs.

To achieve this mosaic pattern, as each stand is evaluated, a silvicultural prescription would be written that best fits that particular stand of timber. Some silvicultural treatments that may be included are stand improvements, shelterwoods, seedtrees with reserves, and small clearcuts of 3 to 5 acres in size.





Roads...

What is the plan for roads in this area?

Existing roads and low-standard roads built for temporary use with this project would be used to access the proposed harvest units.

All existing roads would be assessed to ensure that they comply with Best Management Practices, better known as BMPs. To minimize

rutting on roads, the Department will either add seasonal restriction to West Smith Lake Road, reroute the road, or lift the road (see map, page 5).

All other existing restricted gates and roads would be managed as they have in the past to protect wildlife and their habitats and minimize costs for road maintenance.



Seasonal restrictions may be used to prevent the rutting of roads.

Did You Know...

A **board foot** is lumber that measures 12 inches wide by 12 inches long by 1 inch thick.

Mbf is an acronym for one thousand board feet; the 'M' relates to the Roman numeral 1,000. A truck load of logs carries about 4.5 Mbf. In the same token, **MMbf** is an acronym for 1,000,000 board feet.

Dwarf mistletoe is a small leafless, parasitic plant that extracts water and nutrients from live conifer trees, such as western larch and Douglas-fir, and causes swelling,

witches brooms, chlorosis (causes the needles to yellow), reduced growth and reproductive capacity, and, possibly, even death.

The **fir engraver beetle** is a bark beetle that bores tunnels under the bark of the tree for feeding and egg laying. This tunneling action girdles and finally kills the tree over time.

Under the direction of the **State Board of Land Commissioners (Land Board)**, the Department manages timber, mineral, and surface resources on State trust

lands for the benefit of the common schools and other endowed institutions in Montana. The Land Board consist of Montana's 5 top elected officials: Governor, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Secretary of State, Attorney General, and State Auditor.

Snags are standing dead trees or remaining portions of broken off trees. Snags provide feeding and/or resting sites for wildlife species.

The Unit's Involvement in the Whitefish Neighborhood Plan Subareas

Stillwater Unit has had direct and cooperative involvement in the Swift Creek and Beaver Lake/Skyles subareas in the Whitefish Neighborhood Plan. While the Whitefish Neighborhood Plan promotes historical uses of these lands, such as forestry and recreation, the Department will conduct planning in accordance with the Implementation Strategies identified in the Plan. The Environmental Impact Statement will consider current and proposed projects.

Recent timber harvests in the subareas

Recent timber harvest projects in these subareas include the Beaver '99, Beaver 2000, King Bear, Taylor South, and Beaver Bug timber

sales, plus 5 smaller timber salvage permits. These timber sales and permits removed an estimated 6 MMbf and generated more than \$1,400,000.

Purchasers of these timber sale projects have made more than \$400,000 of improvements to the transportation in recent years. Within the Beaver Lake/Skyles Subarea alone, over 19 miles of road have been built or reconstructed.

Land Use Licenses

The active Land Use Licenses in the Beaver/Swift Subarea include several for commercial snowmobiling/trail grooming, and groomed Nordic ski track, plus the General Recreation Permits. Beaver Lake has 20 cabinsite leases located on its shore. Each of these generate revenue for

the trusts.

Fisheries monitoring in the Swift Creek drainage

The money the Department annually contributes toward fishery monitoring is used to identify fish presence through spawning surveys in Swift Creek and tributary streams. The work is done in cooperation with Montana's Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Monitoring water quality on Stillwater State Forest

Monitoring water quality, including the Swift Creek drainage, has been an annual practice since 1976. Monitoring has included total suspended sediment, nutrient load (nitrates and phosphates), and stream discharge.

Guided Field Tours

Stillwater Unit personnel are planning to conduct several tours of the Beaver Lake and Lower Swift areas to provide information on forest conditions. The tours will also give us the chance to show the public the various opportunities involving forest management in these areas.



A tour during October 2001 for the Moose Fire Salvage and Reforestation Project in the North Fork area.

Who, what, when, where, and...

Call Stillwater Unit (406-881-2371) to indicate interest in participating in a field tour. Each tour will last approximately 2 hours. Wear clothing and footwear appropriate for rain, bugs, and uneven terrain.

• Beaver Lake Area - June 27th

A total of 3 tours will be conducted in the Beaver Lake area. The group will meet at the State information sign at the end of Beaver Lake County Road, approximately 1.7 miles from Highway 93 (see map, page 4). The 2:30 and 6:30 p.m. tours will be lightly to moderately strenuous with stops along the road or a short walk around Dollar Lake. The tour at 4:30 p.m. will involve a guided hike through steep, uneven terrain

and could be considered moderately strenuous.

• Lower Swift Creek Area - June 28th

A total of 2 tours will also be conducted in the Lower Swift Creek area. The group will meet approximately 200 yards up Lower Whitefish Road, a gravel road that can be accessed via East Lakeshore Drive and DelRey Road (see map, page 5). The tours will take place at 3:30 and 6:30 p.m. and will range from walks along the roadways to more arduous trips through the forest.

• Skyles Proposal Area

Kalispell Unit has no tours planned at this time. If interest in a tour is shown, accommodations will be made.

Contact Stillwater State Forest for more information or if you require special help to participate in a tour (406-881-2371)

What is the Next Step in the Process?

Feedback

The ID Team would like your feedback on the proposal as identified in this newsletter and on the field trips. Please have your comments to Dave Ring, Stillwater State Forest, P.O. Box 164, Olney, MT 59927 (e-mail: dring@MT.gov) by July 12, 2007 for consideration in the next phase of this project.

Defining and Developing Alternatives

After compiling and reviewing the input, the ID Team will finish identifying the issues, start defining and developing alternative ways to achieve the project objectives, and begin assessing the effects on the various resources.

Future Opportunities to Comment on this Project

The Department will solicit public comments at least once more when the Draft Environmental Impact Statement is published, likely in the spring of 2008.

Future Involvement in this Project

If you do not have concerns or comments at this time, but wish to stay involved in this project, fill out and return the form on the back of this page. If DNRC does not receive any response, you will be removed from the mailing list.

The public comment period ends on July 12, 2007 for the initial phase of this project.

State of Montana

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If You Wish to Stay Involved in this Project

I do not have concerns or comments at this time, but would like to stay involved in the process of project development. Following are my name, address, and telephone number:

Please send this form by July 12, 2007 to: Stillwater State Forest, P.O. Box 164, Olney, MT 59927 or call the information to Margaret at 406-881-2662.